

## Against the Grain

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# @Brunning: People and Technology -- At the only Edge that Means Anything/How We Understand What We Do

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on orders from a blind Egyptian cleric **Omar Abd al-Rahman**, stabbed **Naguib Mahfouz** twice in the neck with a switchblade as he sat in a car outside his Nileside home in Greater Cairo." Wow. How fast can I drive home in order to continue?

Once home, I continued with the Introduction: "The young man who attacked the then 82-year-old author, the first Arab to be awarded the **Nobel Prize in Literature**, clearly intended to silence him forever. Though the assault, which damaged the nerve that controls his right arm and hand, did prevent him from writing for over four years, the fanatic's mission failed. Not only did **Mahfouz** survive this nightmarish crime — he lived to tell us his dreams." Twenty-five dreams later, I forced myself to momentarily set the book down to absorb what I was reading in this incredible gem of a book.

Just as we learn cause and effect in science, **Mahfouz's** literature provides the same illustration. "*Children of the Alley*," the serialized fiction that provoked the attack, is set in Gamaliya and follows mankind's corrupt ascent from the days of **Adam** and **Eve** to the era of modern science. "*The Dreams*" is the result.

Each dream is short, yet some how busy. You awake with him in the middle of a scenario carrying some meaning, defining a feeling of his about the world and its conflicts. He is on the street, at his house in Abbasiya, praising God, looking for love, bathing naked in the shadow of a crescent moon, hungry — "faint with starvation yet enticed by hope."

As I read the dreams I found myself marking Dreams 5, 20, 30, 55, 57, 77, 84, and 85 with bright orange post-it notes. I re-read these marked Dreams several times while writing this column as I wanted to include one dream in the text. I narrowed the mental debate to Dreams 5 and 57. Unable to choose I finally decided to leave you with both Dreams.

"Dream 5. — I am walking aimlessly without anywhere in particular to go when suddenly I encounter a surprising event that had never before entered my mind — every step I take turns the street upside-down into a circus. The walls and buildings and cars and passersby all disappear, and in their place a big top arises with its tiered seats and long, hanging ropes, filled with trapezes and animal cages, with actors and acrobats and musclemen and even a clown. At first I am so happy that I could soar with joy. But as I move from street to street where the miracle is repeated over and over, my pleasure subsides

and my irritation grows until I tire from the walking and the looking around, and I long in my soul to go back to my home. But just as I delight once again to see the familiar face of the world, and trust that soon my relief will arrive, I open the door and find the clown there to greet me, giggling."

"Dream 57. — I walked around the fort twice — a citadel of stone whose windows were like tiny holes. From each window appeared a face that I not only knew, but adored. Some had been traveling a long while; others had departed our world at different times. I stared with passion and grief — and imagined that each one was begging from its depths for me to set them free. After looking hopelessly at the stone fort's gate, I went to the authorities to ask for help.

I left them feeling satisfied, clutching a pole made of steel, and returned to the fort. I brandished the pole, and the faces peered out as I struck a mighty blow at the door, which split apart and collapsed. The faces banished from the windows as shouts of joy and pleasure rose up, and I stopped, my heart beating hard — waiting to meet the dear ones with longing and desire."

If you want to read the other 102, **PASCAL** is very user-friendly. 🐼

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## @Bunning: People & Technology

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### At the only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

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by **Dennis Brunning** (E Humanities Development Librarian, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

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#### News Analysis

##### *The Internet is Dead...Long Live the Internet!*

Recently, a much downloaded *Wall Street Journal* article drew our attention to the Internet's death. Dead? **James Altucher**, a portfolio manager and columnist for **Dow Jones Newswire**, told another *Wall Street Journal* reporter, **Simon Constable**, that the investment play for **Google**, **Facebook**, and other Internet companies is dead.

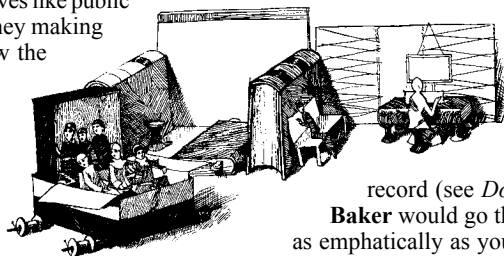
**Altucher** wasn't dismissing the Internet's value — like others he admitted he lived on the Internet — working, writing, leisuring and whatever else we do 24/7. The problem with making money on the Internet, though, has changed. Now, the Internet behaves like public utility with the EBITA, Beta, and other money making dynamics of a — yawn — necessity. Now the Internet isn't so exciting anymore.

So **Altucher** doesn't buy Internet companies for his portfolios and doesn't recommend them to customers. If he trades them, he treats them like ConEd — you know those low priced black and white properties on the Monopoly board. He is short on **Google**.

Instead, **Altucher** argues, the Internet is no longer significant as business; it has matured and become part of our quality of life.

Take note **ATG** readers. Business drives all and one way to look smart is to pronounce on key trends. Say with a wink (or sigh) that however cool Library 3.0 is, too bad, so sad, it has no business model. Won't sell in this world.

Flip side of this coin: the library is business durable. It has buildings, books, the Internet. It delivers quality no matter what the business trend. And no ticker symbol.



Your link: <http://seekingalpha.com/article/140485-would-buffett-consider-google-a-great-investment>

#### Panic in Kindle Park

*It is the Summer of the eBook, the Summer of Kindle...*

@**Bunning** is addicted to the **Kindle**. We don't endorse it for library consumption; we're just saying it's got great stuff, junk that we need. We don't even search **Amazon** anymore; we **Kindle** the **Store**. Our man **JeffoB**, fixes us on \$9.99 (special books extra). The **Amex** is teetering on its own subprime crisis...

Not everyone is addicted thank **God**. Read **Nicholson Baker's** bibliocentric **Kindle** profile in a recent *New Yorker*. **Baker** asks if the **Kindle** can improve on the book.

No.

Now you might, having read **Baker's** book on how librarians are jeopardizing the written record (see *Double Fold* — you can buy on **Kindle**), suspect **Baker** would go thumbs down on the **Kindle**. He does — but not as emphatically as you might think. **Baker** has it all down including limited content, quality control issues, cold comfort, a stupid name. But **Baker**, a bibliophile, reader, and good writer knows the "e" writing is on the wall. He knows a bad sign: good enough for his kid, good enough to change history...

And now, the summer eBook news is that **Amazon** has competition. The enemies at the gate include **Barnes & Noble**, **BeBook**, and others.

Not every critic is keen on **Barnes & Noble's** line in the sand. **David Pogue**, the **CNBC** tech guy, concludes **B&N** markets a paper

*continued on page 69*

tiger. The chain bookseller will sell stuff that will work on **PC**, **Mac**, and **iPhone/touch**. This beats **Kindle** which goes nowhere close to the desktop or laptop but does app out to the **iPhone/touch**. **Pogue** pounces on the booksellers claim of 750,000 titles as opposed to the **Kindle's** mere 270,000. Apparently 500,000 titles are **Google Book** scans from the library project. These are freely available on **Google** and wildly vary in scan quality. Just not good enough for prime "e" reading time.

But you've got to give it up to **B&N** for putting its **E Reader** on **Blackberry**, **iPhone/touch**, **PC**, and **Mac**. Just look at the screenshots. Just the sight of that **iPhone** — so touchable, so sleek, chic, and doable. Well, it's addictive.

The upside for libraries is the renewed market for reading. And for the publishers with whom we've had a decent two hundred or so year "relationship," it keeps them "agnostic" open to any distribution channel and closed to dominance by any one distributor or device maker. This mixes it up for the publishers offering no one device maker dominance over distribution — an opportunity for us to buy with variety.

The downside is all those patrons lining up at the circulation desk or its online equivalent, palming yet another gadget in front of you, demanding download.

Right now the **Sony** approach bodes well for us. The download service supports formats that work on computer and the **Sony Reader**. The reader uses technology on par with the **Kindle** and has gotten good reviews. Hands down, **Sony's** content is beautiful. @ **Bunning** owns versions of several **Uplike** novels from **Rossetta Books, LTD** which rival original hardcover editions as quality print objects.

But the **Kindle**...it's everywhere we be online. When we wake up and check email, **Amazon** has recommended books. When we check the book blogs, we've got links upon **Kindle** links. When **Amazon** can't deliver we can tell the publisher, please **Kindle** this book. Please, please, please. What's an addict to do?

Addendum: at press time, Canada was still without the **Kindle**. **Amazon** doesn't have a cell phone contract in the Dominion and although most US and UK books are copyright cleared for Canadian distribution, many book publisher contracts with **Amazon** preclude Canadian sells. Some intrepid readers have programmed an app that helps download **Kindle** books to a device that happens to be the **Sony E Book Reader**.

O Canada, sorry! You may have universal health but you don't have **Kindle**.

**Your Links:** [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/08/03/090803fa\\_fact\\_baker?yrail](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/08/03/090803fa_fact_baker?yrail)

<http://www.cnn.com/id/32314269>

<http://www.ereads.com/2009/06/canada-secedes-from-kindle-sphere-of.html>

## Fragments

@Bunning Fragments — they will make you whole...

**KGB — Knowledge Generation Bureau** (<http://kgb.com/>)

Almost instant answer service for those who got wireless minutes to spare and got to know attention spans...hmm, another next generation reference service? Going for it — a new channel, the omnipresent cell phone. Against it — information wants to be free (or something to that effect).

**KGB** prices each text answer at 99 cents — **Steve Job's** magic price. It is the dollar store of information. Remembering that **Google Answer — Google's** simulacrum for the reference desk — folded its auction priced service a few years ago, **Ask.Com** (**AskJeeves** if you ask us) never had a run except in the corporate sponsorship of Sunday afternoon **NASCAR**, and **Yahoo Answer** limps along more often wrong than right, well, we wonder about **KGB**. Is there a business model in a happy hour question service via cell phone. Why do you have to ask someone questions when your phone is so smart?

Reference at your thumb tips? Or the **Kremlin** called and wants its name back?

## The Long Shaggy Tail of Blogging

*Some journalists see the long tail of blogging dying off.*

**Peter Whitehead**, Digital Business Editor for the *Financial Times*, scoffs at the notion that blogs — the ordinary variety — were ever significant. **Whitehead** pointed to traffic reports that the majority of the millions of blogs haven't been updated in the last four months and most of this solipsistic writing has moved to social media like **Twitter** and **Facebook**.

Consequence has never been an attribute of common blogging or so argues **Mr. Whitehead**. Apart from a small percentage which inform or entertain they have little value. They are as **Whitehead** phrases it "vanity publishing only made feasible by the removal of costs."

The big problem **Whitehead** concludes is that the ordinary person doesn't have the time to blog. At work you are supposed to be, well, working. The successful blogs are linked to organizations able to provide time, resources, and justification to spend inordinate amounts of labor on this resource intensive activity.

Tippling point for libraries — good blogs are journalism and we take journalism seriously. And we work in the long tail. At some point we will be faced with buying **Proquest Blogs** or **EbscoBlog**. Or one of us, with our peculiar vision for shelf life, will print out and file the "best blogs" 2015. Then when these blogs are lost in the cloud, some company will digitize these files, paying someone a modest fee for this essential slice of the past.

Perhaps **Twitter** and **Facebook** are wagging the long tail of blogging that really never was there in the first place?

**Your Link:** <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/433cabd4-6a92-11de-ad04-00144feabdc0.html>

## Serendipity and Whereabouts in the Digital Deluge

It's a digital deluge and we can't keep up. How can anyone disagree? Who can afford to examine ten million pages delivered in less than a tenth of a second? Hence the success of social media where friends, twitterers, and delicious types recommend stuff. Digital stuff. And we are the happier. But are we wiser?

**Damon Darlin**, *New York Times Business* writer, laments the loss of serendipity brought on by the digital glut

Say what? Who knows anything but that stumbled upon in **Wikipedia** or in blogosphere? Ah, but here's the rub. Serendipity requires an open system, a free range of information that isn't pre-selected. Without this freedom, Web 2.0 and its user generated content is just group think.

But is anyone noticing? Or does anyone care? For business reasons, **Facebook** and **Twitter** care. By the minute apps are being created to help manage our time and information to keep us using the tools consuming our time and information. But is there a programming sequence for chance, an algorithm for the "ah ha" moment?

The social media wunderkinds think so. **iPhone** offers an app where you shake the device to randomize results then browse a choice. **Twitter** apps exist to sort, arrange, and prioritize. Sound familiar?

Librarians sit at the center of the knowledge social network. We need to get busy with the hive.

**Your Link:** <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/02/business/02ping.html>

## Who'd Have Thought?

Libraries, of all kinds, are popular in the economic downturn. Last Christmas, we had **Brian Williams** and the **Nightly News** doing a little trendspotting. And a season later, full down in the summer in the city, **John Naughton** notices the uptick but worries about future funding. Apparently all this popularity has kicked up thievery (Spend less, read more, enjoy the air conditioning — just don't steal the books, DVDs, CDs, summer reading posters featuring **Bono**...)

We're guessing that the library never lost popularity; it's popularity that lost the library. Now popularity is fickle. Were mother right, we would all be the most popular but that isn't so. Sometimes just numbers aren't a good measure of value.

Mother was right. Thieves who know the value of a good book are right. And over the long hot summer and into the Fall, Winter, and Spring of relentless fog of the future, all those entering the library out of the cold — or heat — and into the library are right. We have bearing...

**Your links:** <http://tinyurl.com/klbo56>

<http://memex.naughtons.org/archives/2009/04/06/7262>

<http://www.thedailymash.co.uk/news/arts-&-entertainment/libraries-tops-for-book-thieves-once-again-2007041665/> 